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THE SÃO PAULO FORUM: IS THERE A NEW LATIN AMERICAN LEFT?

William I. Robinson

FIFTY YEARS OF THE THEORY OF CAPITALIST DEVELOPMENT

Paul Sweezy

CUBA AND THE NEW WORLD ORDER

Fred Judson

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NOTES FROM THE EDITORS

In the Review of the Month in the issue of April 1984 ("The Federal Deficit: the Real Issues"), we wrote that "today's capitalism finds itself on the horns of a dilemma: it can't live without deficits and it can't live with them." This is as true today as it was then, and nothing confirms it more convincingly than all the hoopla that has surrounded the issue in this year's presidential campaign.

First let us dispose of the two most common fallacies about the deficit. (1) Any household or business that continues to spend more than its income will sooner or later go bankrupt, and the same holds for governments. This is true for cities and states but not for national (i.e., sovereign) governments. One of the two defining attributes of sovereignty, validated by both theory and history, is the power to create money (the other is the power to make war). Given this prerogative, national governments can always pay their bills. Doing so can of course create problems but certainly not bankruptcy. (2) Borrowing to cover deficits reduces the amount of capital available for private investment. This would be true only on the assumption that the economy's productive capacity (labor power and capital equipment) is fully employed and any resort by governments to the capital markets unavoidably has the effect of "crowding out" private borrowers. But nowadays advanced capitalist economies are fully employed

(Continued on inside back cover)

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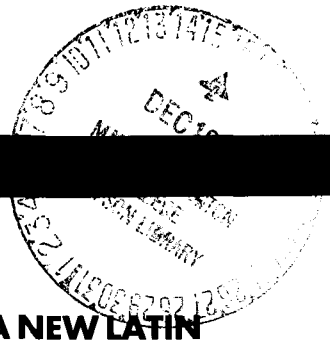

REVIEW OF THE MONTH

THE SÃO PAULO FORUM: IS THERE A NEW LATIN AMERICAN LEFT?

by WILLIAM I. ROBINSON

Is there a new left emerging in Latin America in the post-Cold War era? Over the past few years, a quite diverse group of parties and movements has coalesced around a reconstructed left identity. All of them share a commitment to rethink revolution and social change in the new international situation of the 1990s. This group includes the Workers Party of Brazil (PT), the Sandinista National Liberation Front of Nicaragua (FSLN), the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front of EL Salvador (FMLN), the Democratic Party of the Revolution of Mexico (PDR), the Broad Front of Uruguay (FA), the Free Bolivar Movement of Bolivia (MBL), the United Left of Peru (IU), and the Lavalas movement of Haiti, among others. Taken collectively, they are poised to play a major role in the hemisphere in the 1990s as a counterweight to the neoliberalism currently being pushed on the continent by transnational capital and local ruling elites.

For instance, taking advantage of limited electoral openings provided by a shift from military to civilian rule in 1990, the Broad Front in Uruguay captured the mayorship of Montevideo in 1990, home to almost half the country's population.

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Similarly, left and progressive groups in Paraguay united under the "Asunción for Everyone" coalition following the collapse of the Stroessner dictatorship in 1989, and captured city hall in the country's capital. Both coalitions have used local power to challenge corruption and the traditional parties, to mobilize the population, and to expand their social base.

Brazil's PT is viewed by many as the "rising star" of the left in the Third World. In Haiti, the liberation theologist Jean-Bertrand Aristide was swept into the presidency in December 1990 by a mass grassroots movement, in what was termed "the first revolution after the Cold War." Despite the coup d'état which deposed Aristide in September 1991, the Lavalas movement retains its vitality, making Haiti ungovernable by the current military dictatorship. In El Salvador, the FMLN has forced the government and the United States into a negotiated settlement that opens the way for the former rebels to compete peacefully and legally for political power, promising authentic democratization for the first time in the history of the Salvadoran republic.

The Sandinistas, now out of power, remain the principal political force in Nicaragua. In Mexico, there is a democratic and progressive movement outside the governing PRI for the first time since the revolution of 1910. In Chile, the Socialists share government with the Christian Democrats and the left has not been marginalized despite the best efforts of Washington and the Pinochet dictatorship. In Guatemala and Colombia, peace and stability will be difficult to achieve without the participation of the left.

These institutional inroads underscore the potential for the left to compete in civil and political society in new historic circumstances, and reflect the high level of popular discontent with the prevailing social order. However, such gains should not be exaggerated; the overriding challenge of the new left is to translate formal, institutional inroads into structural transformation and social change, an undertaking which is far from accomplished.

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The São Paulo Forum and Post-Cold War Thinking in Latin America

At the invitation of Brazil's PT, in July 1990 representatives from forty-eight leftist parties, organizations, and fronts—including those mentioned above and others, among them the Cuban Communist Party—met in São Paulo to interchange ideas and experiences. The participants established the São Paulo Forum with the objective of developing unity and collective strategies and programs. The final resolution stated: "We express our joint determination to renew leftist thought, to correct erroneous conceptions, to overcome all bureaucratism and all obstacles to an authentically social and mass democracy."[1]

In June 1991, the Forum held its second meeting, hosted in Mexico City by that country's PDR and attended by sixty-eight organizations from twenty-two nations. The final resolution read:

> Our discussion has been frank, open, democratic, pluralist, and unitary, involving a broad spectrum of forces. Some of us identify ourselves as nationalist, democratic, and popular, and others are decidedly socialist. We are all committed to the structural transformations of our societies necessary to fulfill the aspirations of our peoples for social justice, democracy, and national liberation.[2]

Nicaragua's FSLN hosted the third conference of the Forum in Managua in July, 1992.

The process of rethinking on the part of the Latin American left has challenged all the old dogmas. The collapse of the socialist bloc, although it jarred political and ideological points of reference for many, also accelerated the creation of a new identity for the left in Latin America. Despite the diversity of the São Paulo Forum and the ongoing, often fierce debates within and among left parties and organizations, general points of agreement can be identified. Summarized below are the basic tenets of the new thinking, derived from a careful study of the policies, platforms, and documents circulated by São Paulo Forum groups. Taken as a whole, they

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point to the development of new paradigms for revolutionary struggle in Latin America.

Revolution and democracy are indivisible. Democracy refers both to the internal life of leftist organizations and to the democratic political and social organization of society. The latter includes formal representative democracy (elections, the rule of law, traditional civil and political liberties, etc.), as well as social justice, economic democracy, grassroots participation and empowerment, and democratization of the state. "The history of Eastern Europe made it crystal clear that absolute power is an error and that people do not live on bread alone," affirms FMLN leader Joaquín Villalobos. "There is no democracy without revolution, and no revolution without democracy."[3]

Revolutionary projects may unfold in the context of political and social pluralism, civic and electoral competition. Far from arguing that the "new world order" has rendered popular struggles and revolutionary aspirations obsolete, the new left is proposing that recent developments have opened the possibility for social confrontation to take place on the political terrain, without a military dimension, and that meaningful social change can be achieved through battles waged within the realm of civil societies liberated from military influence. This is an arena where the left may press for change through mass mobilization and participation in the structures of representative democracy. Having to compete in elections means that the left must win approval for its program from a majority of society, beyond its own core constituency. This, in turn, forces accountability and subordinates left parties and leadership to mass social bases.

Military fetishism is out of date. The new left has not rejected armed struggle or revolutionary violence *in principle.* "We can't repeat today the mistakes made in the 1970s when it was said that those who didn't pick up a gun weren't revolutionaries," asserts FSLN General Secretary and former Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega. "Nor can we say today that in order to be a revolutionary, it is necessary to forget about armed

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struggle and get involved in the institutional process of the bourgeois-democratic systems."[4]

The fetishism of armed struggle which characterized an earlier generation of revolutionary movements is being replaced by reconsideration of the relationship between the military and the political. This relationship was perverted in the 1960s by an erroneous interpretation of the Cuban experience, influenced by Regis Debray's military *foquismo*.[5] With an end to military fetishism, politics is regaining its position as the essence of revolutionary struggle. Such eminently civic groups as the PT have ruled out armed struggle, not as illegitimate, but as entirely inappropriate for Brazil at this time. Other groups, such as the FMLN and the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG), as well as several political-military organizations in Colombia, have redefined the role of armed struggle during the 1980s as a necessary instrument to bring about the conditions that allow the struggle to be transferred to civic terrain.[6]

Revolutionary movements must move from ideology to a politics rooted in the specific realities of the nation. The tendency in the past has been to substitute ideology for politics and political objectives as the focus for uniting people and linking the political action of separate groups. "Political groups who, on the one side, represent the marginalized and the impoverished, and on the other side, the privileged and the wealthy, have concrete and contrasting interests which each will pursue," says Victor Hugo Tinoco, a Sandinista militant and former Nicaraguan Deputy Foreign Minister. These groups "have not disappeared with the Berlin Wall or the socialist bloc." However, the junctions between distinct interests are now expressed "less through dichotomous schemes or ideologies which draw societal divides than through the contradictions between concrete policies and goals. This is the harbinger of political struggle in Latin America."[7]

Progressive change and revolutionary transformation of society are not one-class projects. The old debate among Latin American leftists which posited an opposition between reform and rev-

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olution has given way to the view that there is no contradiction between struggling for reforms and struggling for revolution. Fundamental transformations in Latin America will be achieved through broad multi-class national projects that bring together popular majorities, well beyond "workers and peasants."

The relations among the state, civil society, and power must be restructured. The correlation of social forces in civil society is at least as important as who actually holds state power, maybe more so. Although it is of great importance, state power can only transform society if it mobilizes popular majorities with hegemony over civil society. The state must be democratized through popular control over its activities.

The days of vanguardism and verticalism are over; the autonomy of the new social movements must be respected and encouraged. There has been a real revolution of civil society in Latin America. Mass popular and social movements have burgeoned, demanding thoroughgoing democratization of political, social, and economic life. Indigenous communities, women, campesinos, trade unions, ecological and religious movements, shanty-town residents, the poor and marginalized everywhere are becoming "new historic subjects." These social movements advance the demands of specific popular sectors, yet also embody wide aspirations for a new social order.

Different sectors may link their struggles in numerous ways around an overall popular project. It is not for a single "vanguard" to lead masses of people, but for masses of people to organize themselves and become actors in their own struggles. The role of a revolutionary organization in these struggles is to help articulate the actions of diverse sectors and forces.

The old vanguardist conception of a revolutionary movement keeping mass social movements under close control in conformity with its revolutionary line and program is obsolete. The relation between revolutionary organizations and mass social movements is perceived as mutually reinforcing. How-

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ever, the new left groups have not yet defined the precise nature of this relation.

In Brazil, the PT has avoided interfering in the autonomy of the social movements, including the trade-union movement from which the party sprang. "The trade-union leaders who belong to the PT subordinate their own party position to that defined by the trade union," explained Joaquin Soriano, a member of the PT National Directorate. Similarly in Mexico, the PRD "is developing relations with the social organizations, but the latter maintain complete autonomy from us," explains PRD leader Adolfo Gilly. "We are taking care not to repeat the corporatist tradition of the PRI [the governing party]."[8] In Nicaragua the FSLN has been critical of the way the party subordinated the mass organizations that grew up in the wake of the 1979 revolutionary triumph. This had the effect of stifling grassroots initiative and creativity. Participation in the mass organizations declined and the social base eroded.

The Salvadoran FMLN, itself an amalgamation of five organizations, envisions itself as a centripetal force for uniting diverse national sectors around a popular alternative. In the words of FMLN Central Command member Eduardo Sancho, "A remarkable and unprecedented process of social and political organization has taken place in El Salvador. In the face of this process, the FMLN has come to accept a broad leadership shared among the multiple social and political movements, in a new and evolving pluralist situation . . . . [This implies] a collective, or shared vanguard—in other words, a political rather than an organic articulation of numerous groups."[9]

The Historic Context of the Latin American Left

The new left is emerging at a time of crisis in Latin America and at a great historic crossroad. The profound changes that are taking place make this decade strategic. The 1990s will decide what combination of international forces will guide humanity into the next century.

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The breakup of the self-proclaimed socialist bloc shifts the axis of world tensions from East-West to North-South, and has accelerated immiseration in the South. The share of global GNP going to the underdeveloped world, which has some 75 percent of the world's population, dropped from 23 percent in 1980 to 19 percent in 1990. The UN Development Program estimates that an additional 100 million people in the South will become impoverished every year of the 1990s.[10]

In Latin America, the number of people living in extreme poverty went from 112 million in 1980 to 184 million in 1990, nearly half of the continent's population. Latin America decreased its participation in the international market from 7 percent in 1980 to 4 percent in 1990, and the area's foreign debt exceeds $430 billion, a source of permanent economic hemorrhage.[11] What is happening constitutes an historic decapitalization of Latin America that rivals the colonial plunder of the sixteenth century.

Meanwhile, the United States has emerged from the Cold War with its control over the Americas intact, at least for the time being, with the invasion of Panama, electoral intervention in Nicaragua, destabilization in Cuba, and the military and political penetration of South America through "drug wars" and other forms of intervention.

Against this backdrop, Latin America is entering an uncertain transition. The entire framework of social and political struggles has shifted; the left and popular sectors are increasingly pitted not against the oligarchies of yesterday but against a new right. In nearly every country, the old oligarchies have given way to this new right. As the dominant class fraction in Latin America, it is overseeing a sweeping social and economic restructuring of the continent in accordance with the neoliberal model. The latter, in turn, is part and parcel of a global economic order in which transnational capital has become hegemonic. In every region of the world, states, economies, and political processes are being transformed under the guidance of a class-conscious transnational bour-

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geoisie. The new right in Latin America is the local representative of this class.

The magnitude and consequences of late twentieth century neoliberal restructuring of Latin American economic life have been far-reaching. It has uprooted vast numbers of workers and peasants, throwing masses of people into the informal sector where survival demands both legitimate and illegal activities. Restructuring is weakening the state as an instrument of economic regulation, accelerating the outward drainage as well as the internal concentration of wealth, and reducing each country's ability to guide its own national development. It has had devastating social repercussions, creating a whole new class of cast-offs, locked out of any meaningful or productive participation in society.

The Challenges of the New Left

Populism and traditional social democracy have been the dominant political currents in most of Latin America during the years since the Second World War. Both of these currents have largely run their course. In their wake, the new right and the left have become the ascendant forces. Though the former swept to power in the 1980s, it is now facing a mounting crisis of political legitimacy and social tensions brought about by structural adjustment. The much talked-about "social explosions" have already begun in several countries.

The contradictions of neoliberalism open up new possibilities as well as enormous challenges for the left. Nearly twenty Latin American countries will hold elections between 1993 and 1996; in many cases, the left stands a good chance of winning the government. The biggest challenge it faces is the lack of a strategic alternative to the neoliberal model. Constructing such an alternative is its most urgent task. Without its own project, based on a viable socioeconomic model, the left runs the risk of stagnating out of government, or even

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worse, of being reduced—once in government—to administering the crisis of neoliberalism.

Acutely aware of the need for an alternative project, over fifty economists and other experts from a special working group of the São Paulo Forum met in Lima, Peru, in late February. Titled "Integration and Alternative Development in Latin America," the meeting's purpose was to begin developing a viable left alternative to neoliberalism. The results of the meeting were then presented to the Forum plenary in Managua. Developing an alternative program will continue in meetings of five regional sub-groups (Southern Cone, Andean bloc, Central America, the Caribbean, and Mexico) scheduled for 1993, with the participation of popular and social movements. The aim is to achieve consensus on national electoral platforms before the series of elections during 1993-1996 period.

An alternative project is far from elaborated. However, there is recognition that the socioeconomic transformation of society must conform to what is possible in the late twentieth century and to the reality of actual participation in a capitalist world economy.

Rather than nationalizing the means of production, the new left groups emphasize democratizing property ownership, deconcentrating wealth, and promoting broad, associative forms of production and solidarity among producers. In sharp contrast to neoliberals, they stress a vital role for the state in a mixed economy where markets and planning mechanisms are combined. The state should help regulate investment, accumulation, and distribution, and state property should be one of several forms of ownership (state, private, mixed, and cooperative). Similarly, the state should promote the development of the domestic market through structural reforms (including agrarian reform) and the encouragement of small and medium producers.

The participants in the Lima meeting also stressed redirecting hemispheric integration away from U.S. domination and towards Latin American integration "with a nationalist

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focus and a continental perspective that addresses North-South inequalities." In the view of the São Paulo groups, the process of transnationalization now taking place calls for internationalization of the revolutionary struggle in Latin America. The prospects for success of a popular national project in any one country are linked to cooperation and integration among Latin American countries. There are well-known limitations on social change within any one nation. The only way Latin America can develop its own negotiating power vis-a-vis the developed countries of the North is through collective action and cooperation. This, in turn, depends on the extent to which popular sectors gain power in Latin America and use it to shape national and foreign policies. This view does not argue that withdrawing from the world economy is an option, or that Latin American nations can resolve their problems exclusively by interacting among themselves. Rather, integration and collective action are the bases upon which Latin America can maximize its strength and negotiate better terms for its participation in the world economy.

"The solution to our difficulties and problems lies in the profound transformation of our societies and in the political and economic integration of Latin America and the Caribbean," stated the resolution from the 1991 meeting in Mexico. "[This is] the basis upon which we may pursue our emancipation in the face of the restructuring of world capitalism and contribute to forging a new international order that respects our national values and satisfies the needs of our peoples."[12]

NOTES

1. "Decalaración de São Paulo," July 4, 1990. Published in *Boletín Sur-Sur,* no. 1 (the São Paulo Forum, January, 1992).
2. "Declaración de Mexico," Mexico City, June 15, 1991 in *Boletín.*
3. "Gracias Por No Fallarnos," address by Joaquin Villalobos to the First Congress of the FSLN, Managua, July 21, 1991. Reprinted in *La Avispa,* no. 6 (Managua, August-September, 1991).

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4. "For An International Front of Struggle," address by Daniel Ortega in Managua, October 4, 1991. Reprinted in *Barricada Internacional,* vol. XI, no. 345 (Managua, November, 1991).
5. See Regis Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution?* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967).
6. See, for example, "El Salvador: Modelo Para Desarme," and "Posibilidades de una Salida al Conflicto en Colombia," presentations made by the FMLN of El Salvador and the Simon Bolívar Guerrilla Coordinating Committee of Colombia, repsectively, at the Second Symposium of the Guerrilla and Civic Left of Latin America, June 1991, Managua, Nicaragua. In *La Avispa.*
7. Victor Hugo Tinoco, "American Latin Frente al Año 2,000," in *Cuardernos del Centro de Estudios Internacionales,* no. 1 (Managua, May 1991).
8. Both quotes are cited in "La Nueva Izquierda: Criticar No Basta," in *Pensamiento Propio,* year IX, no. 82 (Managua: CRIES, July, 1991).
9. Eduardo Sancho, "El Salvador Frente a los Desafíos del Siglo XXI (Parte II)," in *Estudios Centroamericanos,* year 16, no. 510 (San Salvador, April, 1992).
10. United Nations Development Program (UNDP), *Human Development,* (New York, 1991).
11. Sistema Economico para America Latina (SELA), *Informe Annual 1990.*
12. "Declaración de Mexico."

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Posterity has picked practically all its heroes from the agitators. They are the saints and holy men of our religions.

—Heywood Broun

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The Theory of Capitalist Development Chapter I, "Marx's Method"

by PAUL SWEEZY

The year 1992 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of The Theory of Capitalist Development *by Paul Sweezy. It was originally published by Oxford University Press but for many years has been an MR Press title. It has been translated into many languages (German, French, Italian, Spanish, Polish, Serbo-Croat, Japanese, Chinese, among others) and has served as an introduction to Marxism for thousands of students around the world. The MR Press edition still has a steady sale, mostly for classroom use. To observe the occasion and remind readers of the book's continued availability, we reproduce here the first chapter entitled "Marx's Method." This seems to us particularly appropriate in view of the sorry state and dismal prospects of capitalism as we approach the twenty-first century. If this continues, as we are confident it will, a renaissance of Marxism, the heart and soul of which is a critical analysis of capital and capitalism, is as predictable as anything in the realm of human affairs can ever be.*—The Editors

Discussions of methodology in economics, as in other fields, are likely to be tiresome and unrewarding. Nevertheless, to avoid the problem altogether is to risk serious misunderstanding. In this chapter, therefore, we shall attempt as briefly as possible to set forth the chief elements in Marx's approach to economics. This is the more important in Marx's case since many of his original and significant contributions are precisely of a methodological character. Lukacs, one of

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the most penetrating of contemporary Marxists, has even gone so far as to assert that "orthodoxy in questions of Marxism relates exclusively to method."[1]

1. The Use of Abstraction

From a formal point of view Marx's economic methodology may appear strikingly similar to that of his classical predecessors and his neo-classical successors. He was a strong adherent of the abstract-deductive method which was such a marked characteristic of the Ricardian school. "In the analysis of economic forms," he wrote in the Preface to *Capital*, "neither microscopes nor chemical reagents are of use. The force of abstraction must replace both." Moreover, Marx believed in and practiced what modern theorists have called the method of "successive approximations," which consists in moving from the more abstract to the more concrete in a step-by-step fashion, removing simplifying assumptions at successive stages of the investigation so that theory may take account of and explain an ever wider range of actual phenomena.

When we inquire further, however, we find striking differences between Marx and the representatives of the classical and neo-classical tradition. The principle of abstraction is itself powerless to yield knowledge; the difficult questions concern the manner of its application. In other words, one must somehow decide what to abstract from and what not to abstract from. Here at least two issues arise. First, what problem is being investigated? And, second, what are the essential elements of the problem? If we have the answer to these questions, we shall surely know what we cannot abstract from, and, within these limits, we shall be able to frame our assumptions according to criteria of convenience and simplicity. Now, we need go no further than the first question to convince ourselves that economists have not always been in agreement on their objectives. The problems which several well-known economists have set themselves for investigation may be cited:

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"the nature and causes of the wealth of nations" (Adam Smith); "the laws which regulate the distribution of the produce of the earth" (Ricardo); "man's actions in the ordinary business of life" (Marshall); "price and its corollaries" (Davenport); "human behavior as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses" (Robbins). No doubt there is overlapping here, but it is doubtful if any two could be regarded as identical. From this it follows that no two investigators will handle their materials—including the manner in which they apply the weapon of abstraction —in exactly the same way. One may abstract from a difference which another is trying to explain, yet each may be justified from the point of view of the problem which he is studying. This must be particularly kept in mind by the student of Marx, since his objective—"to lay bare the economic law of motion of modern society"[2]—is radically different from that of non-Marxian schools of thought.

Even after the investigator's task has been determined, however, there is still no sovereign formula to guide his footsteps. As Hegel very correctly remarked in the Introduction to his *Philosophy of History*: in the "process of scientific understanding, it is of importance that the essential should be distinguished and brought into relief in contrast with the so-called nonessential. But in order to render this possible we must know what *is essential*. . ."[3] To bring the essential into relief and to make possible its analysis: that is the specific task of abstraction. But where to start? How to distinguish the essential from the nonessential? Methodology can pose these questions, but unfortunately it cannot provide ready-made answers. If it could, the "process of scientific understanding" would be a far more routine matter than it actually is. In practice, it is necessary to formulate hypotheses about what is essential, to work these hypotheses through, and to check the conclusions against the data of experience. If we are to understand the achievement of a particular scientist we must, therefore, try to identify his key hypotheses and to see, if possible, where he gets them from and how he develops their im-

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plications. It need hardly be pointed out that this is not always an easy matter, but in the case of Marx we know enough about his intellectual development to make the attempt.

As a student at the university, Marx concentrated in jurisprudence and philosophy and planned to enter upon an academic career. His "radical" leanings—though at the time he was not even a socialist—prevented his getting a teaching position, and in 1842 he accepted the editorship of the newly founded *Rheinische Zeitung*. In this capacity he came into contact for the first time with actual social problems and also with new social ideas, particularly the socialist and communist ideas which were emanating from France in such quantities in the 1830's and 1840's. In a controversy with the *Augsburger Zeitung*, Marx was somewhat discomfited to discover that he did not know what to think of socialism; he therefore resolved at the first opportunity to give the subject the serious study which he was convinced it merited. The opportunity was not long in coming; in a few months the *Rheinische Zeitung* was shut down by the authorities, and Marx found himself a free agent. He immediately plunged into an intensive study of socialism and communism, of French history, and of English political economy. It was during the next few years, spent mostly in Paris and Brussels, that he broke with his philosophic past and achieved the mature point of view from which he was to write his later economic works. In short, his approach to economics was shaped and determined long before he decided to make the study of economics his primary concern.

We have in the justly famous *Preface to The Critique of Political Economy* a statement by Marx concerning his intellectual development during these crucial years. Though many readers will be familiar with this preface, it may perhaps not be amiss to reproduce a portion of it here. (The italics are added.)

> I was led by my studies [he wrote] to the conclusion that legal relations as well as forms of state could neither be understood by themselves, nor explained by the so-called general progress of the human mind, but that they are rooted in the material conditions of

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life which are summed up by Hegel after the fashion of the English and French of the eighteenth century under the name "civil society'; *the anatomy of that civil society is to be sought in political economy.* The study of the latter which I had taken up in Paris, I continued at Brussels. . .The general conclusion at which I arrived and which, *once reached, continued to serve as the leading thread in my studies,* may be briefly summed up as follows: In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society—the real foundation on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political, and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production in society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or —what is but a legal expression for the same thing—with the property relations within which they had been at work before. From forms of development of the forces of production these relations turn into their fetters. Then comes the period of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed.

It is apparent from this that Marx's primary interest was society as a whole, and, more especially, the process of social change. Political Economy—the "anatomy" of society—is significant not primarily for its own sake but because it is in this sphere that the impetus to social change is to be found. It must be emphasized, because the contrary has so often been asserted, that Marx was not trying to reduce everything to economic terms. He was rather attempting to uncover the true interrelation between the economic and the non-economic factors in the totality of social existence.

Once having reached the conclusion that the key to social change is to be found in movements of the mode of production, Marx was in effect committed to an exhaustive

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study of political economy from the standpoint of the laws governing changes in the mode of production. "To lay bare the economic law of motion of modern society" now became the scientific goal to which he devoted most of the remainder of his life.

How, given this objective, could one recognize the essential aspects of the problem? Marx retained, because they seemed to stand up under searching studies into the actuality of historical development, those elements of Hegel's thought which emphasized process and development through the conflict of opposed or contradictory forces. Unlike Hegel, however, he traced decisive historical conflicts to roots in the mode of production; that is, he discovered them to be what he called class conflicts. Thus the *Communist Manifesto* (1847), after an introductory note, begins: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles." The economic forces at work manifest themselves in class conflicts under capitalism as under earlier forms of society. It follows that the essential economic relations are those which underlie and express themselves in the form of class conflict. These are the essential elements which must be isolated and analyzed through the method of abstraction.

Even this hypothesis, however, could lead to divergent procedures. The classical economists were also very much interested in the economic roots of class conflicts—in a sense this is exactly what "the distribution of the produce of the earth" meant to Ricardo—but the social antagonism which occupied most of their attention, both intellectual and emotional, was the conflict between industrial capitalists and landlords. Consequently they placed great, sometimes predominant, emphasis on land and the income derived from the ownership of land. Indeed, without a knowledge of "the true doctrine of rent," Ricardo asserted, "it is impossible to understand the effect of the progress of wealth on profits and wages, or to trace satisfactorily the influence of taxation on different classes of the community. . ."[4] Marx recognized the tendency to lay primary emphasis on land and rent, but he

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regarded it as misguided. "Nothing seems more natural," he wrote, "than to start with rent, with landed property, since it is bound up with land, the source of all production and all existence, and with the first form of production in all more or less settled communities, viz., agriculture."[5] Nevertheless, he added at once, "nothing could be more erroneous." His reason for adopting this attitude is the key to his subsequent procedure. In capitalist society,

> agriculture comes to be more and more merely a branch of industry and is completely dominated by capital. . .*Capital is the all-dominating power of bourgeois society.* It must form the starting point as well as the end and be developed before land ownership is. . .
>
> It would thus be impractical and wrong to arrange the economic categories in the order in which they were the determining factors in the course of history. Their order of sequence is rather determined by the relation which they bear to each other in modern bourgeois society, and which is the exact opposite of what seems to be their natural order or the order of their historical development. What we are interested in is not the place which economic relations occupy in the historical succession of different forms of society. . .We are interested in their organic connection within modern bourgeois society.[6]

The italicized sentence is particularly important. That "capital is the all-dominating economic power of bourgeois society" meant to Marx, as it would have meant to one of the classical economists, that the primary economic relation is that between capitalists and workers. As he expressed the point in another place, "The relation between wage labor and capital determines the entire character of the mode of production."[7] Even before he began his researches for the *Critique* and for *Capital*, he had expressed the same judgment in the *Manifesto*: "Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes facing each other—bourgeoisie and proletariat." This relation must form the center of investigation; the power of abstraction must be employed to isolate it, to reduce it to its purest form, to enable

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it to be subjected to the most painstaking analysis, free of all unrelated disturbances.

The adoption of this position requires a procedure involving at least two fairly distinct steps.

First, all social relations except that between capital and labor must be provisionally assumed away, to be reintroduced, one at a time, only at a later stage of the analysis.

Second, the capital-labor relation itself must be reduced to its most significant form or forms. This is not a quantitative question; it does not mean that the most frequent, or modal, forms of the relation must be selected for analysis. Significance, in this context, is a question of the structural characteristics and tendencies of the whole society. Marx, as is well known, selected the forms of capital-labor relation which arise in the sphere of industrial production as the most significant for modern capitalist standard types, from which all characteristics irrelevant to the relation under examination are removed. "Individuals are dealt with," he wrote in the Preface to *Capital*, "only in so far as they are the personifications of economic categories, embodiments of particular class relations and class interests."

What is the nature of this capital-labor relation? In form it is an exchange relation. The capitalist buys labor power from the worker; the worker receives money from the capitalist with which he acquires the necessaries of life. As an exchange relation, it is clearly a special case of a large class of such relations which have a common form and structure. It is evident, therefore, that the study of the capital-labor relation must begin with an analysis of the general phenomenon of exchange.

In this way we arrive at the actual starting point of Marx's political economy. Part I of the first volume of *Capital*, which summarizes the earlier *Critique of Political Economy*, is entitled "Commodities." Whatever is customarily intended for exchange rather than for direct use is a commodity; the analysis of commodities, therefore, involves the analysis of the exchange relation and its quantitative aspect (exchange value);

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it includes, moreover, an analysis of money. As we shall see later on, some of Marx's most interesting results arise out of the treatment of commodities.

Having laid the necessary foundation with the analysis of commodities, Marx proceeds to his main task. *Almost the entire remainder of the first volume of* Capital *is devoted to the capital-labor relation in its "isolated" and "purified" forms.* In other words, Volume I begins and remains on a high level of abstraction.

It is difficult for those unacquainted with Marx's method to believe that this statement can be meant seriously. They point to the wealth of factual and historical material which is such an outstanding feature of Volume I. Does this not mean that Marx was, in fact, just the reverse of abstract? This reasoning misses the point. The legitimate purpose of abstraction in social science is never to get away from the real world but rather to isolate certain aspects of the real world for intensive investigation. When, therefore, we say that we are operating on a high level of abstraction we mean that we are dealing with a relatively small number of aspects of reality; we emphatically do not mean that those aspects with which we are dealing are not capable of historical investigation and factual illustration. A cursory check-up is sufficient to indicate that the great bulk of the factual material introduced by Marx in Volume I relates directly to the capital-labor relation and is of an illustrative or historical character. It constitutes, therefore, a confirmation rather than a contradiction of the statement that Volume I begins and remains on a high level of abstraction.

The establishment of this fact allows us to draw an important corollary, namely, that the results achieved in Volume I have a provisional character. In many cases, though not necessarily in all, they undergo a more or less extensive modification on a lower level of abstraction, that is to say, when more aspects of reality are taken into account.* It follows that the tendencies or laws enunciated in Volume I are not to

*This aspect of Marx's method is well treated by Henryk Grossmann in the Introduction to his book *Das Akkumulations- und Zusammenbruchsgesetz des kapitalistischen Systems*, 1929.

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be interpreted as direct predictions about the future. Their validity is relative to the level of abstraction on which they are derived and to the extent of the modifications which they must undergo when the analysis is brought to a more concrete level. Recognition of this fact would have saved a great deal of sterile controversy. As an example we may cite the famous "law of the increasing misery of the proletariat," which Marx called "the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation."[8] Anti-Marxists have always maintained the falsity of this law and have deduced from this the incorrectness of Marx's analysis of capitalism.* Some Marxists, on the other hand, have been equally concerned to demonstrate the truth of the law,** and so a controversy producing much heat and little light has raged for more than a half century. Both sides are guilty of the same misunderstanding of Marx's method. The law in question is derived on a high level of abstraction; the term "absolute" used in describing it is used in the Hegelian sense of "abstract"; it constitutes in no sense a concrete prediction about the future. Moreover, in this particular case, Marx says as much in perfectly clear language, so that misinterpretation seems peculiarly difficult to condone. Having stated the law, he immediately adds, "Like all other laws it is modified in its working by many circumstances, the analysis of which does not concern us here." It would be impossible to have a plainer warning not to interpret the law as a concrete prediction. A proper regard to problems of method would have rendered this misunderstanding, along with many others, unnecessary.

We need not discuss the whole plan of *Capital.* For present purposes, it is only necessary to point out that the intent of Volumes II and III was to take into account factors which were consciously left out of Volume I, that is to say, to

*Grossmann cites a large number of examples. *Das Akkumulations- und Zusammenbruchsgesetz des kapitalistischen Systems*, pp. 23 ff.

**Perhaps the most recent example is the pamphlet by Alex Bittelmann and V. J. Jerome, *Leninism—the only Marxism Today* (1934). This pamphlet is a criticism of Lewis Corey's *Decline of American Capitalism* (1934).

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bring the analysis to progressively lower levels of abstraction. At the same time, and in a sense paradoxically, Volumes II and III contain relatively less factual material than Volume I. This is accounted for by their unfinished state. In compiling Volumes II and III from Marx's manuscripts, Engels found a great deal of illustrative material, but it was "barely arranged, much less worked out."[9] Volume I, on the other hand, Marx prepared for the press himself, so that he was able to integrate his factual and theoretical materials in a way which Engels could not possibly have accomplished for the later volumes without going far beyond the functions of an editor, a course which he wisely declined to pursue.

We have discussed Marx's use of abstraction in general terms and do not propose at this stage to enter into particular cases. It is well to note, however, that a great many criticisms of Marx's economics are, consciously or unconsciously, based upon a rejection of the assumptions with which he works. Our discussion should help to establish criteria by which to judge the validity of these criticisms. In each case, the following three questions should be asked about the simplifying assumptions (or abstractions) which give rise to criticism: (1) are they framed with a proper regard for the problem under investigation? (2) do they eliminate the non-essential elements of the problem? (3) do they stop short of eliminating the essential elements? If all three of these questions can be answered in the affirmative, we may say that the principle of appropriate abstraction has been observed. This principle is of great assistance in testing the relevance and validity of a considerable range of Marx criticism.

2. The Historical Character of Marx's Thought

Marx's method, says Lukacs, "is in its innermost essence historical."[10] This is certainly correct, and no discussion of the problem which fails to emphasize it can be regarded as satisfactory.

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For Marx, social reality is not so much a specified set of relations, still less a conglomeration of things. It is rather the process of change inherent in a specified set of relations. In other words, social reality is the historical process, a process which, in principle, knows no finality and no stopping places.* Social systems, like individuals, go through a life cycle and pass from the scene when "from forms of development of the forces of production" they "turn into their fetters." The process of social change, however, is not purely mechanical; it is rather the product of human action, but action which is definitely limited by the kind of society in which it has its roots. "Men make their own history," Marx wrote, "but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given, and transmitted from the past."[11] Society both is changing and, within limits, can be changed.

Consistent adherence to this position leads to a consistently historical approach to social science. Moreover—and this is but another aspect of the same thing—it leads to a critical approach to every form of society, including the present. The importance of this point is difficult to overstress. It is a characteristic feature of non-Marxian thought that it can comprehend the transitory character of all earlier social orders, while this same critical faculty fails when it is a question of the capitalist system itself. This is, no doubt, true to a certain extent of all historical epochs, but, as we shall see later on, there are special reasons why it applies with peculiar force to our own.** For the typical modern thinker, as Marx expressed it, "there has been history, but there is no longer any."[12] Lukacs' remark in this connection is striking:

*"There is a continual movement of growth in productive forces, of destruction in social relations, of formation in ideas; the only immutable thing is the abstraction of movement—*mors immortalis*." Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* (New York: International Publishers, no date), p. 93.

**See Paul Sweezy, *The Theory of Capitalist Development* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1942), pp. 34-40.

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This un- and anti-historical core of bourgeois thought appears in its most glaring form when we consider the *problem of the present as a historical problem*. . .The complete incapacity of all bourgeois thinkers and historians to comprehend world-historical events of the present as world history must remain an unpleasant memory to all level-headed people since the world war and world revolution.[13]

Nothing that has happened since 1922 could lead one to alter this judgment; rather the contrary. Marxists, on the other hand, consistently interpret contemporary events in a world-historical context. The difference is obviously not a question of intelligence; it is a question of method and approach.

Most people take capitalism for granted, just as they take the solar system for granted. The eventual passing of capitalism, which is often conceded nowadays, is thought of in much the same way as the eventual cooling of the sun, that is to say, its relevance to contemporary events is denied. From this point of view one can understand and criticize what happens within the framework of the system; one can neither understand nor evaluate what happens to the system itself. The latter fact not infrequently takes the form of a simple denial that one can meaningfully talk about social systems. Great historical events, however, generally concern whole social systems. The result is that to the typical modern mind they assume a catastrophic character, with all that this implies in the way of emotional shock and intellectual confusion.

To the Marxist, on the other hand, the specific historical (i.e. transitory) character of capitalism is a major premise. It is by virtue of this fact that the Marxist is able, so to speak, to stand outside the system and criticize it as a whole. Moreover, since human action is itself responsible for the changes which the system is undergoing and will undergo, a critical attitude is not only intellectually possible, it is also morally significant—as, for example, a critical attitude toward the solar system, whatever its shortcomings, would not be—and, last but not least, practically important.

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NOTES

1. Georg Lukacs, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* (Berlin: Der Malik-Verlag, 1923), p. 13.
2. Karl Marx, "Author's Preface to the First Edition" *Capital*, I (Chicago: Charles Kerr & Company, 1933), p. 14.
3. G. W. F. Hegel, World's Greatest Literature ed., *Philosophy of History*, (New York: Cooperative Publication Society, 1900), p. 65. Quoted by Henryk Grossmann in "Die Änderung des ursprunglichen Aufbauplans des Marxschen 'Kapital' und ihre Ursachen," *Archiv für die Geschichte des Sozialismus und der Arbeiterbewegung*, Bd. xiv, Heft 2 (1929), p. 327.
4. David Ricardo, Gonner ed., *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1929), p. 1.
5. Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Chicago: Charles Kerr & Company. 1933), p. 302. The quotation is from the unfinished "Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy," which was not published as a part of the *Critique* in the original edition (1859). It was written by Marx in 1857 and was first published by Kautsky in 1903. It is included as an Appendix in the English (Kerr) edition.
6. Ibid., pp. 303-304. Italics added.
7. *Capital*, III, p. 1025.
8. Ibid., I, p. 707.
9. Ibid., II, (Editor's Preface), p. 7.
10. Lukacs, p. 7. One of the best discussions in English of this aspect of Marx's thought, and, indeed, of all the problems treated in this chapter, will be found in Karl Korsch, *Karl Marx* (1938).
11. Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers Company, Inc., no date), p. 13.
12. Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* (New York: International Publishers, no date), p. 102.
13. Lukacs, p. 173.

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CUBA AND THE NEW WORLD ORDER

by FRED JUDSON

Cuba today is in a complex situation. On the national level, it is beset by a serious economic crisis, societal stresses, and dysfunctions in its political structures. On the ideological level there is stress and partial paralysis, and yet still much vitality. Finally, the domestic-international links that affect its political, economic, social, and ideological situation were already in transition when the world events of the last three years both accelerated and overtook them. The New World Order has confronted Cuba with its most difficult and complex challenges since the revolution. Virtually all observers and participants agree with that judgment, including Fidel Castro.

What are the developments that have led to a crisis for Cuba? First, the bipolar "Cold War" conflict has come to a sudden end. That bipolarity and its political content afforded Cuba a refuge, a structure of solidarity, and a strategic military defense against the ever-present hostility of the United States. The existence of the Soviet Union was a necessary condition for the survival and development of the Cuban revolutionary state. Soviet power was a deterrent to U.S. aggression, and the Soviets provided military assistance for Cuban self defense and

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much of the material means for sustaining and developing the Cuban economy.

The effective disappearance of Cuba's patron superpower is reinforced by the weakness of the Non-Aligned Movement and other manifestations of a "Third World Movement," by the apparent hegemony of neoliberal politics and economics in Latin America, and by the impossibility that China could fill the political vacuum left by the Soviet Union. It leaves Cuba exposed and relatively isolated, and it goes without saying that Cuba can no longer provide the kind of support it has in the past to such revolutionary movements as the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and the FMLN in El Salvador, much less project the kind of military power it provided in Angola and Ethiopia in the 1970s and 1980s.

But Cuba retains a strong self defense which discourages direct U.S. military action. It retains considerable Third World sympathy, even admiration, for its social and economic achievements, its internationalism (in Africa, Latin America, and Asia), and its "predicament." It has also developed a respected professional and diplomatic corps which defends its interests effectively. For instance, the United States failed to engineer an attack on Cuba at the 1991 Guadalajara meeting of Latin American heads of state. At the same time it must be acknowledged that Cuba's influence in the hemisphere and elsewhere in the Third World has declined. Cuba no longer has a leading voice on the Latin American debt question. Even in its role as champion of anti-imperialism in Latin America it has less of an audience, as states seek economic advantage in their relations with the West. Moreover, Cuba is on the defensive in Latin America, as many states call for Cuba to hold elections, enter the market economy, and address alleged human rights violations.

Cuba and Global Economic Restructuring

The main outlines of recent developments in the global economy are familiar, and the principal debates focus on their

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significance and relative importance. There is no dispute that what was called the socialist international division of labor (symbolized by COMECON) is gone, that depression and marginalization characterize the economies of much of the South, that there is increased concentration of productive capacity, trade, and income in the North, and that there are severe distortions in the economies of the North.

If those are the broad outlines, what are the specifics of Cuba's relationship to them? Here the situation is more critical even than in the international political arena. There is a severe economic contraction going on in Cuba. And though it is to a considerable degree a product of Cuba's own dynamics, policies, and conditions, it is also a direct result of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Cuba's economic dependence on the socialist international system was very high—85 percent of its trade was with the socialist countries, mostly with the Soviet Union, and within that was the crucial oil/sugar connection. And Cuba was tied to that system by preferential pricing agreements, petroleum resales for hard currency, military equipment, and so forth.

With drastic cuts in hundreds of trade arrangements with COMECON partners, it is astonishing that the Cuban economy functions at all. Castro's numerous presentations of the facts to the Cuban public over the past year supply ample data for such a conclusion. There are extreme shortages of almost every imported item, from oil to vehicle parts to raw materials for producing glass containers. There is a severe lack of hard currency, making it difficult to maintain the crucial trade relations with capitalist countries (sources of very important technology and inputs), let alone to engage in expanding those relations or purchasing oil. There is the continuously depressed world sugar market. With the disappearance of the preferential pricing arrangements with the socialist countries, Cuba now has to compete more directly with other sugar producers in a market where the prices are consistently below the costs of production. There is the high degree of Cuban technological dependence on the former socialist economies

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that developed over three decades. However problematic those trade relations were, much of Cuba's impressive development in infrastructure, agriculture, transportation, and industrialization relied on their continuation.

The Cubans use the term "special period in peacetime" to sum up this confluence of domestically and externally driven economic problems. Rectification had scarcely begun to deal with state enterprise inefficiencies, the imbalances of the command economy, and the contradictory roles of the market when events in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union swept away COMECON and most of the "givens" in Cuban economic planning. Every possible negative consequence of the end of these "givens" has appeared: plummeting production, investment, and consumption, rationing of basic consumer goods, factory shutdowns, energy and transportation cuts, diminished variety and quantity of foodstuffs, and a proliferating black market are but some of them. The unreliability of shipments of essential industrial, agricultural, chemical, and pharmaceutical inputs means that planning and production are seemingly impossible. Transport breaks down for lack of spare parts and replacements. Unemployment, vagrancy, delinquency, and prostitution have all increased. Already existing shortages of housing, day-care centers, and other social services have been exacerbated, especially in Havana.

The rectification and a series of reforms sought to deal with structural contradictions in the "command economy" that had been in place since around 1975. In theory and in practice, the changes tried to retain socialist planning and principles in production, distribution, and consumption. At the same time, the pressures of reality and shifts in orthodox socialist thinking led the Cubans to introduce market institutions into the domestic economy. The basic idea was to permit closely regulated markets in agriculture, food distribution, housing, services, etc., and also to seek and extend Cuba's reinsertion into the international capitalist market. Cuba has never been autarkic, never a Caribbean Albania. But global

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economic conditions make the present a far from propitious time for an increase in interactions with capitalist economies. Aside from the tightened U.S. trade embargo, there is very stiff competition for foreign investment—from the erstwhile socialist economies, in particular, but also from "structurally adjusted and adjusting" economies in Latin America, Asia, and even Africa.

The sheer scale and quality of the dependencies Cuba had developed with the COMECON countries had been a concern of policy makers and think tanks in Cuba for some time. There was an expressed desire to move from the 85/15 ratio of trade with socialist countries relative to trade with capitalist countries that characterized the late 1980s to 75/25, more like the late 1970s, and finally to 60/40. Diversification was to be achieved by expanding trade with Canada, Western Europe, Japan, and Latin America—especially Brazil, but also Argentina, the Andean countries, and Mexico, a long-time trade partner.

The current official position with regard to a "reinsertion" into the global capitalist economy focuses on finding markets for Cuban products and securing major foreign investments. Targeted areas are tourism and bio-genetic, medical, and bio-medical technology, with electronics, textiles, nickel, sugar production technology, food processing, citrus crops, seafood, and tobacco identified as critical but secondary. However the capital has not been very forthcoming or significant, some joint ventures have been summarily ended by foreign investors, and together the foreign direct investment and joint ventures certainly did not fill the gap left by the end of the sugar/oil arrangement with the Soviet Union. In addition, Cuba has a significant debt to Western banks which discourages many investors.

Another frequently-expressed reason for seeking reinsertion into the world economy is to avoid being left behind in the current "scientific and technological revolution." Even with prodigious efforts to create a corps of advanced scientific personnel, particularly in medical research, Cuban scientists

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and technicians fear they are isolated from trends in research and development in a variety of areas.

The single most critical link of the Cuban economy with the rest of the world is oil. Fidel Castro calls it an "Achilles heel" and has exhaustively put the details on the public record on numerous occasions. The facts are stark. Even if the inefficient and aging Russian production centers can produce enough to ship oil to Cuba, they cannot supply what they used to. And hard currency at world prices has replaced oil for sugar at preferential prices.

The Ideological Dimension

For three decades, Cuba's political identity has been "revolutionary socialist." It has been correctly perceived as unique, different from the East European mold where Communist Party leadership did not enjoy popular support. Cuba, through its almost larger-than-life leader Fidel Castro, has achieved a profile in international politics far beyond its apparent means. It has been a passionate critic of capitalism and imperialism, an advocate of revolution, and an acolyte of actually-existing socialism. It has also sought to be an exemplary bridge between the Third World and the socialist camp.

But the momentous developments of the last several years and the difficulties Cuba is now experiencing have placed it squarely in socialism's crisis of theory and practice. The rethinking or abandonment of socialism as a goal, a model for development, or a framework for human justice in other parts of the world has removed much of the sense that Cuba is part of an established and powerful socialist order. The fundamental questions about socialism—Just what is it, anyway? Was what has disappeared in Eastern Europe really socialism? What explains socialism's failure to compete economically with capitalism? What is the linkage between socialism and democracy?—seem alternately to multiply or disappear from the international political and ideological agenda. There is more pity, opprobrium, and dismissal of

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Cuba in the international ideological arena than admiration or fear. As Cuba suffers, its status as a Third-World socialist alternative—not just to military dictatorship but also to the "democratized and liberalized" Chiles, Argentinas, and post-Sandinista Nicaraguas—enjoys far less profile and legitimacy. And it suffers this diminution not just officially but in the media and among peoples, political parties, and progressive movements.

Liberal democracy may indeed be flawed and restricted to a minority of states in the world system, but as a political ideology it is triumphant. And the speed with which that ideological supremacy has spread lends its triumph a dramatic tone of finality. In such an atmosphere, with the accompanying general rightward shift within liberal democracies and with the sweeping embrace by much of the world of neoliberal economic policies, Cuba has had to contend with greatly intensified ideological assaults.

The reaction of the Cuban leadership to this onslaught has several elements. There is a perceptible, and given the circumstances understandable, desperation in some of the responses. For example, Fidel Castro advances the notion that Gorbachev betrayed both socialism and the Soviet patriotism of the Second World War. He grants that changes were necessary, but holds that ending the Communist Party monopoly on power was a crucial error. There is a certain grim satisfaction evident in Cuba about the economic chaos, greed and speculation, the privation, criminality, ethnic and national conflicts, and chauvinism in the former Soviet Union. There is some positive identification with China's reforms as a superior model—economic reforms coupled with political orthodoxy and party monopoly. Since there are very few states left with which Cuba can identify ideologically, and then only to its detriment in the eyes of most of the world, Cuba must affirm itself as socialist because not much else is or wants to be socialist in the New World Order. Cuba has become the "keeper of the flame."

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There is a perception both inside and outside Cuba that the only feasible recourse is a retreat to orthodoxy, to a kind of socialist fundamentalism. Such a perception ignores the reality of a very lively debate in many arenas of Cuban intellectual, cultural, and political life. Nonetheless, it does find some reflection in the state's policies, in the practices of the bureaucracy and the party, in the functioning of state enterprises. There the degrees of orthodoxy, alongside a certain paralysis and a palpable uncertainty, are higher than in Cuban society in general.

Official Cuban ideology does indeed recognize national and historical variations in the correct paths to and practices of socialism, but it presently emphasizes that it is Cuba's "destiny" to embody socialist values. To paraphrase Fidel Castro, Cuba has not sought that destiny; destiny and history have sought Cuba. They have determined that Cuba will bear the responsibility and the glory. It is in this context that the exaggerated claim is made that "Cuba is the most democratic country in the world." There is a renewed emphasis on the continuity of Cuban history: Martí and the nineteenth century struggle for independence; the heroes and martyrs of the struggles against U.S. imperialism and the various gangster regimes it supported in Cuba in the twentieth century; identification of Cuba as part of the socialist and Marxist current in human history; Cuba's exemplary Third-World revolutionary internationalism; Cuba as the crucible of the "New Man"; Cuba as the paragon of Latin American unity; and, presently, Cuba as defender of the faith.

In the midst of the triumphal celebration of liberal democracy and neoliberal economics, Cuba's persistent critique of capitalism goes unheard. Its eloquent condemnation of the debt burden as a crime of capitalism has faded since the mid 1980s. The end of the wars in southern Africa and the weakening of apartheid, let alone the virtual impossibility of Cuba's projecting its military power to other parts of the world, have reduced its international role. The contradictory but measurable democratization in Latin America, the effec-

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tive cessation of revolutionary armed struggle in Central America, and the thorough rethinking that is going on within the Latin American left, have equally reduced the impact of the Cuban example. Notwithstanding these changes, Cuba's leadership and probably a majority of its population continue to point to the negatives of capitalism and liberal democracy, and especially to what they mean for the peoples of the South. Cuba points to the emptiness of bourgeois democracy—especially to the "best election that money could buy" in Nicaragua in 1990. The Gulf War is seen as a continuation of the sleaziest traditions of imperialism. And currently officials and academics in Cuba are insistently critical of neoliberal economics and its programs of structural adjustment, privatization, budget austerity, social cuts, and trade liberalization, particularly in Latin America.

Such critiques are little welcomed by Latin American elites and political leadership. They may be echoed by the "rethinking" left and may capture the experience of the Latin American masses, but neither the left nor the masses have any likelihood of gaining state power in the foreseeable future. And in Cuba itself, there is palpable fatigue and disillusionment with some of the core elements of the revolutionary political culture. After all that Cuba has done in the name of internationalism and solidarity, there is disappointment, even resentment, that there is now so little of either coming Cuba's way in its most difficult hour.

Bringing the Cubans Back In

Why do these combined external and internal crises not produce a general crisis in the Cuban state and civil society? Stock answers from the State Department would focus on the "one-party monopoly of power," the "grip of fear on the average Cuban," "thirty years of brainwashing," the "police state." More sympathetic answers would identify the charisma of Fidel Castro, the continuity and coherence of leadership since the days of the revolution, the peculiar Cuban amalgam

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of national pride, anti-imperialism, and progressive political culture, the real and substantial achievements of the revolution.

It is, in fact, easy to draw up a litany of stresses in the state and governance. The recent Party Congress was really quite limited. It did not substantially expand or revise Popular Power or the role of the National Assembly. It definitively rejected any hint of political pluralism or "free elections." It did not deal with the question of succession or the transfer of power. In a climate of uncertainty, evident stagnation, and semiparalysis of the state bureaucracy, there is increased reliance on Fidel to be the decision maker, the trouble shooter, and the person with ideas. People speak of leading "double lives," one in public which agrees with the orthodox rhetoric and one in private which focuses on getting things done and meeting one's own needs. The black market and various forms of corruption are more and more often mentioned and are apparently proliferating. After the Ochoa affair of 1989 (drug trafficking at the highest levels), there is more disillusionment and cynicism about those who hold power.

But it would be wrong, or at least premature, to speak of a crisis of legitimacy of the state, the Council of Ministers, Fidel Castro, or the Communist Party. There is, after all, no apparent or capable replacement, either in Cuba or in exile. The complex of perceptions, sentiments, emotions, and cognitions that constitute popular consciousness in Cuba identifies the revolution with *cubanidad,* or Cubanness. There is no little pride and solace to be found in not being like the rest of Latin America, not being a pawn of the United States. There is more than a residual pride and meaning to be found in having been on the front lines during the Cold War, in providing an internationalist example, in having a sense of national independence. There is real faith in being able collectively to persevere, to be able to make the requisite sacrifices for survival.

Civil society is indeed experiencing great stress. The shortages and the black market, the de facto unemployment,

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the deterioration of social services, the rationing and the uneasy feeling that there is a stratum of privileged Cubans, the apartheid quality of the relationship between tourist and Cuban citizen—these are some of the grinding and demoralizing aspects of daily life. The complaints about food shortages, poor quality, and lack of variety are becoming fears about real hunger. Perhaps more serious in the long-term political sense are the degrees of cynicism, the dissolution of social solidarity, the justified concern about violent crime, delinquency, and alienation. Some are concerned that the state may respond with repression to popular outbreaks or protests over material privation. The degree of militarization in Cuban society remains quite high, with a great waste of resources and the constant psychological pressure that comes from thirty years of U.S. hostility. There is more doubt about the future than at any time since the revolution triumphed, more critical questioning of the political culture, more critical examination of the socialist economy, more concern about being marginalized in the international intellectual, cultural, scientific, technological, and political arenas.

But I do not see this questioning as a crisis of ideological hegemony or a troubled response to the New World Order. It is the product of thirty years of revolution, which have, in effect, created new social subjects in Cuba. The human resources of Cuba—its literate, educated, healthy, and socially engaged people—are distinct in many respects from those of 1959: they have grown and developed in ways that would not have been possible without the revolution. One can debate, surely, what might have been had there been no revolution, had Cuba not been harassed, assaulted, and embargoed, or had the leadership changed. But the fact is that the most substantial creation of the revolution—today's Cuban people—is the force most likely to maintain it, to transform it, to be orthodox yet flexible, to be inventive, to develop a Cuban democracy, to deal uniquely with unique circumstances. The New World Order and the larger political, economic, and

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ideological context at the international level may be the setting, but the principal actors reside in Cuba.

Nowhere in Havana does one find, as in many Latin American capitals, hordes of child beggars or tin-shack "misery belts." Instead, neat troops of uniformed school children attend day-care centers and schools. Everyone eats, *if not well, and medical care and education are free and available.*

—*Wall Street Journal*, April 19, 1990

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CORRESPONDENCE

Exchange\Encounter Theory And Myths Of America

by Robert Shaffer

As a high school social studies teacher I have used Hans Koning's *Columbus: His Enterprise* to show students a side of Columbus they had not known about—his murderous methods of collecting gold and his personal role in starting the trans-Atlantic slave trade—and to raise questions about historical memory and our current social values. I have also used in the classroom some of Bill Bigelow's fine exercises on South African apartheid and on U.S. labor history. Thus, it is with hesitation and respect that I venture these criticisms of their articles in your special issue on Columbus (July-August 1992).

Both Koning and Bigelow downplay the significance of disease as a factor in the depopulation of the indigenous peoples of the Americas. They argue, first, that the consciously imported structures of domination of the Europeans played a larger role in destroying native culture and population than the inadvertently imported diseases, and, second, that focusing on disease allows the brutality of conquest to go unexamined. On the first point, on Hispaniola and a few other places massive deaths from enslavement and brutality significantly preceded new diseases, but in the lands of the Aztecs, Incas, and most of the rest of North and South America diseases of European origins preceded or accompanied European military conquest, and successive waves of disease had a greater impact on indigenous population than battle deaths or brutal labor systems. Moreover, refusal to recognize the full impact of disease leaves us with no credible explanation for the ability of a few Spanish soldiers and colonists to conquer and rule vast numbers of peoples in such

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sophisticated societies as the Aztecs and the Incas.[1] As William McNeill says in his classic *Plagues and Peoples*, at first it appeared that the Aztecs would defeat Cortez, but

on the night when the Aztecs drove Cortez and his men out of Mexico City, killing many of them, an epidemic of smallpox was raging in the city. . .The paralyzing effect of a lethal epidemic goes far to explain why the Aztecs did not pursue the defeated and demoralized Spaniards, giving them time and opportunity to rest and regroup, gather Indian allies and set siege to the city, and so achieve their eventual victory. Moreover, it is worth considering the psychological implications of a disease that killed only Indians and left Spaniards unharmed. . .The religions, priesthoods, and way of life built around the old Indian gods could not survive such a demonstration of the superior power of the God the Spaniards worshipped. Little wonder, then, that the Indians accepted Christianity and submitted to Spanish control so meekly.[2]

By minimizing the extent of new diseases, Koning and Bigelow actually reinforce the traditional notion that there must have been something superior in European culture to allow it to win, or that the Native Americans must have been primitive indeed to believe that the Spanish were gods.[3]

Bigelow analyzes two "myths" about Columbus and the Conquest, the old one of "discovery" and the new one of "encounter/exchange." He believes that both prevent an understanding of the important issues and lessons of the Conquest, and, in a most unfortunate phrase, he states: "The new myth offers more truth than the old myth and hence it is potentially more dangerous." Neither academic scholars nor progressive activists should ever claim that a more truthful analysis is more dangerous than a less truthful one! Bigelow charges that the new "myth" (I will use the more neutral terms "paradigm" or "model") ignores ideology and social structure in favor of purely biological factors such as plants and diseases as agents of change. He believes the "exchange/encounter" model ignores power relations, is pro-capitalist, denies historical agency to indigenous peoples, and stifles broader questioning about the causes, effects, and current-day meaning of these events. Bigelow also depicts this new way of thinking as a unified and closed system rather than a fluid and dynamic one. I would like to offer a more positive account of this paradigm based on the Smithsonian Exhibition, "Seeds of Change," and its accompanying book of the same name, both of which Bigelow discussed at length, and of the Na-

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tional Council for the Social Studies statement on Columbus, which Bigelow criticizes but does not explicitly examine.

The Smithsonian exhibition, while by no means above criticism, in fact presents a very respectful view of indigenous cultures, including their technological and administrative achievements. The exhibition clearly shows the Incas, Navajos, Plains Indians, and others as moral and intellectual equals of Europeans, not as faceless and unknown hordes. Demonstrating the dependence of modern society on products of Native American civilization (symbolized here mainly by corn and potatoes) goes a long way toward eliminating a Eurocentric model of the development of civilization. The average exhibition-viewer, I think, does come to respect and care about these people. Thus, when they see the graphic depictions of both disease and military conquest in the exhibit, I trust they will think about the moral issues involved, and not just the technical transfer of microbes.

Seeds of Change (the book) by no means ignores human acts and intentions in the "exchange." The editor, Herman Viola, says at the outset that Europeans "set to work despoiling the resources of the New World as quickly as they began destroying its people."[4] Jane Walsh and Yoko Sugiura, in their essay on the Aztecs, also describe the horrible effects of Spanish war and rule. They write of cities burned, causeways destroyed, and dikes broken by the new Spanish rulers, with obvious results for people. Further, "the Spaniards cut down enormous numbers of trees for fuel and consumption, plows cut deep into the fertile chinampas, cattle and sheep grazed the land almost bare, and the water used for irrigation was diverted to supply power to the numerous Spanish mills, thereby destroying the cultivated terraces."[5] Such passages open up enormous questions for student or public discussion about both Spanish rule and current social values.

While the exhibition's analysis of sugar as a "seed of change" was somewhat muddled, the exhibitors made it clear that "exchange" is not always positive. The brief exhibition guide declares that "millions of African slaves paid the price" for the expansion of sugar production that benefitted Europeans. Viola, in the book, writes: "sugarcane. . .was, next to disease, perhaps the most detrimental contribution of the Old World to the New. Sugarcane merits censure because it harmed both man [sic] and the environment."[6] Sidney Mintz's essay in the book, which Bigelow ignores completely, places murderous labor exploitation at the very heart of the sugar production process, and insists that demand for sugar as well as its

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production are socially constructed rather than "natural" processes. Mintz points out that the problems of sugar production (not to mention consumption) are problems for today as well as for yesterday: "the manual laborers involved in its production, though no longer enslaved, are still poorly paid and badly treated. The political history of sugar—often bloody, corrupt, and mismanaged—is still messy and sensitive."[7] Mintz also mentions U.S. control of the Caribbean in this century in order to control its sugar, even subtly praising Fidel Castro for breaking free of U.S. control.[8]

Bigelow complains that while the book says African Americans consistently resisted slavery, it is a "clumsy" portrayal that emphasizes entrepreneurialism rather than revolt. Indeed, the exhibition should have included more on direct anti-slavery resistance. But again, Bigelow ignores Mintz's very explicit discussion in the book on revolts, runaways, maroon societies, and the special importance of the Haitian Revolution.[9] Lydia Pulsipher's expansion of the definition of resistance—which Bigelow criticizes—is in line with much recent social history by left-leaning historians that transcends the old left-wing portrayals of workers, African Americans, and others as either helpless victims of the system or politically conscious rebels, but little else. Pulsipher's approach may have problems, and some of her wording is insensitive, but she does help explain the survival and pride of a people who may not have overthrown the system, but did not submit, either. I recoil from a left analysis which sees in this approach only a "dangerous new myth."

The book and the exhibition see the most poignant lessons for today of the "exchange" and "encounter" to be on environmental issues, and in this sense again they state that the consequences of "exchange" can be negative as well as positive. They show that the European world view on the domination of nature, as represented by Columbus, could lead to disaster. Rather than stifle discussion, they ask us to examine our social values today, as well. In fact, many members of the counter-Columbus activist movement raise similar issues, although much more sharply. (Kirkpatrick Sale's *The Conquest of Paradise* is perhaps the most widely known example.) Bigelow seems to disdain such environmentalism because it blames all Americans, not just the ruling class, for problems. I will agree to an extent, but can he really claim that the working class and the left-wing movements in this country (or any country) have always had the proper approach to environmental issues? Marxists need to study and learn from environmental history and theory, not just attempt to impose our analysis onto it.

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Turning to the National Council for the Social Studies (the professional organization for social studies teachers), its statement shows all the signs of having been drawn up to satisfy a variety of interests and to try not to offend others. Despite its weaknesses, however, it is very useful for progressive teachers and all teachers.[10] The statement represents a great advance over what most teachers and textbooks present about Columbus. Its basic thrust is that all groups—Africans, Native Americans, and Asians, as well as Europeans—were and remain historical actors in the "encounter," that European society was not superior to the others, and that Europeans and their descendants are not better, more important, or more worthy of in-depth analysis than the others. The NCSS attributes Native American population decline above all to disease, but it does not ignore European-instigated wars and the "genocidal and displacement policies of the colonial and postcolonial governments." The statement is less than clear on the nature of European rule and on resistance to European domination, and it ignores questions I raised in my classes—and that Bigelow emphasizes—on the current implications of the Columbus experience. Nor does it close off discussion. The very inclusion of the explosive word, "genocidal," challenges teachers and students to examine their previous ideas. Another phrase, about the slave trade, simply cries out for classroom or public discussion with very subversive implications about the nature of our "immigrant" society: "Until the end of the eighteenth century, the number of Africans who crossed the Atlantic to the Americas exceeded the number of Europeans."

The list of recommended books attached to the NCSS statement is excellent, including many authors who are astute critics of Columbus and of the dominant European ideology: James Axtell, Francis Jennings, Alvin Josephy, Joseph Miller, Gary Nash, Kirkpatrick Sale, Jack Weatherford, and Eric Wolf.[11] (On a purely pragmatic level, it will be easier for progressive teachers in many schools to use such authors for classroom readings since they appear on this list.) A few recommended authors, such as Daniel Boorstin and Samuel E. Morison, are of course representative of the old "discovery" myth. Still others, particularly Alfred Crosby and William McNeill, typify the "exchange/encounter" paradigm, but, again, their books are indispensable reading on this issue. Jack Weatherford's *Indian-Givers: How the Indians of the Americas Transformed the World* is an excellent example of how the "exchange" paradigm converges with a progressive critique of Columbus, of his European world, and of the modern Eurocentric world view. Of

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course, few public school teachers have the time or opportunity to read very much of these works, so there remains a role for progressive education activists and historians to play in drawing out the best ideas of the NCSS study.

Meanwhile, we need to be aware that the old-style "discovery" myth-makers are not limited to the Knights of Columbus and elementary school biographies to which Bigelow referred. The American Federation of Teachers refused to sign the NCSS statement and has attacked it as a simplistic, anti-Columbus statement.[12] The charges totally misrepresent the focus of the document, and are motivated by the AFT leadership's fear of a genuinely multicultural approach to world history and U.S. society that the statement embodies. An article by Harvard Professor Stephan Thernstrom in the tightly-controlled AFT journal, *American Educator*, Spring 1992, makes this attack explicit. Thernstrom argues that the spread of Western Christian culture should be applauded because only in Europe did the idea of freedom of the individual arise. He says, in effect, that there is nothing to be mourned in the destruction of Aztec, Inca, and, by extension, all other Native American cultures and peoples, because world progress comes from Europe.

(On a related issue, Thernstrom rests his case in part on the existence of divisions among Native Americans—divisions which brought allies to the Spanish against the Aztecs, for example. Too many progressive critics of the Conquest would like to wish away such divisions and retroactively impose a Native American solidarity, or Native American and African American solidarity. Jan Carew's article in the July-August *Monthly Review* shows that such solidarity did at times exist, and that it had considerable historical impact. Indeed, the Seminole story is an important one which deserves to be more widely known. But let us point out, too, that Native American societies were very varied and often in conflict with one another, and that African Americans and Native Americans would not always transcend their differences. Some Native American groups returned runaway slaves to their white masters, in hopes of keeping the peace with the expansion-minded whites. The African American soldiers after the Civil War were transferred to the West—to help subdue the Plains Indians.[13] By all means we should publicize inspirational examples of solidarity, but an overly romantic view will allow our opponents to charge that we, too, are propagating a new myth.)

Left activists, educators, and historians can and should find common ground with the proponents of the "exchange/encoun-

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ter" paradigm in countering the still formidable Eurocentric "discovery" myth. We can certainly criticize "exchange/encounter" theorists when appropriate, but we must not be afraid to also learn from their scholarship and insights. We must make sure that issues of racism, war, class structure, economic development, and even religion, as well as the environment, are raised in any discussion of Columbus and his legacy. But closing off our involvement with the "exchange/encounter" theorists, as Bigelow and Koning seem to want to do, is not helpful either to scholarship and education, or to activism.

NOTES

1. For a detailed examination of this issue, see William McNeill, *Plagues and People* (New York: Doubleday, 1976); Alfred Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1972); and Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986). For a similar analysis focusing on the New England area, see William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983).
2. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples.*
3. Ibid., p. 2. McNeill's conclusion that Aztecs submitted "meekly" to European control in the end can certainly be criticized based on subsequent resistance, and in this sense Koning and Bigelow do seize upon a weakness of this school of thought.
4. Herman Viola, "Seeds of Change" in Carolyn Margolis and Herman J. Viola eds., *Seeds of Change,* (Washington DC: The Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991) p. 12.
5. Ibid., p. 41.
6. Ibid., p. 12.
7. Sidney Mintz, "Pleasure, Profit, and Satiation," in Margolis and Viola, eds., p. 129.
8. Readers may also want to consult Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Viking, 1985).
9. Mintz, in Viola, ed., pp. 124-125.
10. The NCSS statement has been published in several journals, including the NCSS's *Social Education* (October, 1991), which is available in most university libraries.
11. The specific books cited include, among others: James Axtell, *The European and the Indian and The Invasion Within*; Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest*; Alvin Josephy, ed., *American in 1492*; Joseph Miller, *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angola Slave Trade, 1730-1830*; Gary Nash, *Red, White, and Black: The Peoples of Early North America*; Kirkpatrick Sale, *The Conquest of Paradise*; Jack Weatherford, *Indian-Givers: How the Indians of the Americas Transformed the World*; Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History.*
12. See *American Teacher,* the AFT newspaper (March-April 1992) p. 7.
13. See, for example, Peter Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: Norton, 1975) p. 53, pp. 155-156, pp.

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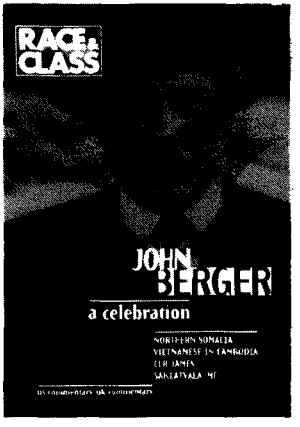
260-261; James Merrel, *The Indians' New World: Catawbas and Their Neighbors* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), p. 181, p. 207, p. 245; and see the *New York Times*, July 26, 1992, p. 14. For an inspirational view of African American and Native American solidarity, which does, unfortunately, ignore evidence to the contrary, see William Loren Katz, *Black Indians: A Hidden Heritage*.



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A Response to Robert Shaffer

by Bill Bigelow

When the Smithsonian's traveling "Seeds of Change" exhibit opened at the Illinois State Library in early September, an official with the Illinois Humanities Council announced, "Some people stand to the right and others to the left in the Columbus controversy. We think this exhibit stands somewhere in the middle." As I pointed out in my article, "Two Myths Are Not Better Than One" (MR, July/August 1992), the encounter/exchange myth is deeply political. It presents itself as an alternative not only to the widely discredited discovery myth but also to a more radical critique that links "Columbus" to contemporary social inequities and resistance movements. In the language of neutralspeak—"change," "encounter," "collision of cultures"—the new mythmakers direct people's attention toward "exchanges" of foods, people, and biota, and away from questions of power, domination, poverty, hunger, and racism. They want folks to believe that theirs are the voices of balance, of objectivity, of intellectual rigor.

And they have been effective. Robert Shaffer may use the encounter/exchange pronouncements of the National Council for the Social Studies and others to open a more critical dialogue with colleagues and students, and I applaud him if that is the case. But my experience over the past year and a half leading Rethinking Columbus workshops with teachers across the country indicates that the new approach frequently distracts educators and others from pursuing a critical inquiry. Instead of probing for the contemporary social consequences of conquest—studying, for example, the continuing transfer of wealth from poor countries to rich ones—Seeds

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of Change leads teachers to explore the gastronomic consequences: students draw twin rainbows and indicate the food products that went from Europe to the Americas and from the Americas to Europe; research projects focus on corn and potatoes, sugar and cheese. Students may be invited to examine the brutality of Spanish conquest, but the Seeds of Change emphasis virtually insures that teachers will "balance" Spanish cruelty with Aztec cruelty. In fact, the traveling Seeds of Change exhibit—coming soon to a museum near you—skips suddenly over Columbus' vicious policies on Hispaniola in favor of pairing Spanish and Aztec practices in Mexico. And of course teachers are urged to spend time learning about the accidental imperial weapon of disease.

Disease: This is where Robert Shaffer begins his polemic against Hans Koning and me. But he apparently misunderstood my argument. I do not dismiss the tremendous human toll wrought by new diseases in the Americas. And I do not disagree that post-Columbian diseases killed more people than warfare or exploitation. I think my point was clear: the encounter/exchange approach attempts to direct our attention away from social factors by focusing so heavily on natural factors and by separating one from the other, dubbing the process "biological imperialism;" blame it on the germs. Yes, tremendous numbers of people died from disease before they ever laid eyes on a European, but many other people's immune systems were surely crippled by the brutality and disruption of colonialism, making them much easier targets for disease. However, when it comes to Taino deaths during Columbus' administration, I am aware of no evidence that proves disease played a significant role. The first recorded smallpox epidemic on Hispaniola was in 1519, thirteen years after Columbus' death. Only by drawing a simplistic, and wrong, dichotomy between disease and social conditions can one suggest that my approach strengthens "the traditional notion that there must have been something superior in European culture" that allowed the conquest. And I never said anywhere that Native Americans thought the Spaniards were Gods.

Shaffer argues that the Smithsonian approach respects indigenous cultures and significantly chips away at the "Eurocentric model of the development of civilization." It does not. Certainly Seeds of Change includes lots more about Indian people than we find in the traditional Columbus myth, but as suggested in my article, Native societies are admired to the extent they resemble Western class societies. Thus, the Eurocentric model is affirmed constantly, if implicitly, in the encounter/exchange myth. Shaffer

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includes in his critique a number of quotes about Europeans' poor treatment of indigenous people and the environment, and these do dot the Seeds of Change narrative. Obviously it would be impossible to even begin to discuss the conquest of the Americas and not occasionally indicate that some people were hurt. But these mentions are almost always tacked-on and passionless, footnotes to a teleological pageant of progress that led to Us. If worthwhile discussion arises from these very brief and occasional passages, as Shaffer suggests, it is because of good critical teaching, with no thanks to the Seeds of Change.

Shaffer scolds me for ignoring Sidney Mintz's "very explicit discussion" of slave resistance in the Caribbean. Very explicit? In sixteen pages of text about sugar and the Americas, the discussion of slave resistance covers exactly two sentences. Likewise today's political economy of sugar production and its consequences for people's lives is touched on in just a couple of phrases—Shaffer quotes them both. Mintz wrote an interesting article, but one that conforms to the Seeds of Change things-are-more-important-than-people approach. Shaffer also accuses me of ignoring broader expressions of resistance by criticizing Lydia Pulsipher's article on Galways plantation in Montserrat. But Pulsipher does not broaden our definition of resistance, she narrows it—slaves "resist" through joining a market economy, through their entrepreneurial activity. Again, Seeds of Change appreciates Africans and Indians when they join or resemble the Western pageant of progress.

Shaffer decides that because I criticize Seeds of Change for its failure to explore the roots of environmental degradation that I must disdain environmentalism. Not at all; I believe merely that we ought to analyze the structures of power that are at work, and not assume that if we all pitch in and recycle it will save the earth. Sure we need to act, but what good is action unless informed by an analysis of the source of the problem?

The National Council for the Social Studies statement may be, as Shaffer maintains, very useful for educators—but perhaps not precisely in the way he intends. The statement, which Shaffer describes, is only an "advance" if we advance it. Like the Smithsonian's Seeds of Change book and exhibit, the NCSS offers its position not just as an alternative to the traditional myth, but also as an alternative to a more critical approach. It is significant, for example, that the NCSS statement does not mention anything about global inequality today and its connection to the birth of colonialism and the slave trade 500 years ago. Instead, the NCSS closes its

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statement by urging teachers to project "contemporary America as a universal nation within an interdependent world." Thus it is the critical dialogue we initiate around the NCSS position that will advance people's understanding and pedagogical practices, not only drawing out the statement's "best ideas," as Shaffer urges.

Historian John Anthony Scott has proposed just such a project and recently drafted an important critique he hopes will be the basis for internal debate in the large number of education organizations that adopted the NCSS stand. As Scott notes, the NCSS statement mirrors the phony even-handedness of Seeds of Change. This document, he writes,

provides a vignette of black, copper-colored, and white peoples sitting down together, teaching and learning from each other and also bringing their own special offerings to a multicultural feast: some, Andean potatoes, others, Mexican maize, Potosi gold, Arabian horses, Andalusian cattle, beaver pelts, woolen blankets or guns.

The NCSS portrait, while more sophisticated than the rah-rah Columbus tales in most textbooks, conforms perfectly to the misleading encounter/exchange myth. Columbus and the Europeans who followed did not bring people together, but utilized the new world market "to enrich themselves at the same time as they accomplished the destruction of peoples of color—Native American and African alike."*

Seeds of Change et al. may seem more benign because they are more truthful than the older formulations. Shaffer's exclamation point notwithstanding, I am saying that a more truthful history can be more dangerous than a less truthful one. Because its cooptive power is so much greater. I have seen it happen over and over this past year and a half: thoughtful teachers, who would likely be open to a more critical social analysis, embracing the Seeds of Change framework because it does not celebrate colonialism and offers a language of balance and multiculturalism.

So let us not shy away from an evaluation of the underlying premises of new historical approaches simply because they seem less offensive than those that have been discredited. To the extent that Seeds of Change and the encounter/exchange framework offer any potential to more adequately analyze today's world, that potential will only be realized through rigorous critique.

*Copies of the critique of the NCSS are available from John Anthony Scott, RR 2, Box 1487, Holland, MA 01521.

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Take This Job and. . .

by Michael D. Yates

Rivethead: Tales from the Assembly Line by Ben Hamper. New York: Warner Books, 1991. 234. pp. $19.95.

My father and Ben Hamper, the "rivethead" of this book's title, have a lot in common. Both spent good portions of their lives as factory workers, my father in a glass works and Ben Hamper in an auto plant. Both became factory workers because it was more or less predetermined that they would. All of their relatives and friends were factory hands. As Ben Hamper puts it, "Right from the outset, when the call went out for shoprats, my ancestors responded in almost Pavlovian compliance. The family tree practically listed right over on its side with eager men and women grasping for that great automotive dream." The high pay and benefits sealed their fates. Both hoped for something better but deep inside knew that the odds were long. The "rivethead" did get out, though not by choice. My father never did, despite the correspondence school courses and the plans to open a small store.

Mr. Hamper gives us a clear, darkly humorous picture of life on the line, telling us things which my father told me, though not in such a frenzied and manic way. The work is hard and dangerous. "Ropes, wires, and assorted black rubber cables drooped down and entangled everything. Sparks shot out in all directions—bouncing in the aisles, flying into the rafters and even ricocheting off the natives' heads. The noise level was deafening. It was like some hideous unrelenting tape loop of trains having sex." Not to mention

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the extremes of hot and cold, lung-clogging dust, and noxious chemicals which will prevent most workers from enjoying their retirement. A foreman actually told my father, now disabled with emphysema, that if you could see the dust it would not hurt you.

The work is unimaginably boring, something which the "rivethead" had, at seven, already discerned on a "family night" visit to the plant to watch his dad work:

We stood there for forty minutes or so, a miniature lifetime, and the pattern never changed. Car, windshield. Car, windshield. Drudgery piled atop drudgery. Cigarette to cigarette. Decades rolling through the rafters, bones turning to dust, stubborn clocks gagging down flesh, another windshield, another cigarette, wars blinking on and off, thunderstorms muttering the alphabet, crows on power lines asleep or dead, that mechanical octopus squirming against nothing, nothing, nothingness.

The trick is to beat the clock anyway you can. Play "rivet" hockey. See how high you can kick packing boxes. Pretend you're going for the gold at the riveting olympics. Be a practical joker. Best of all, "double up" if you can, that is, do both your own and your partner's job while he rests and vice versa. When this can be done for half the shift, each worker has four hours of freedom, to read, sleep, head for the bars, or go home.

The work is stressful. For a long time, my father was a glass examiner; he checked plates of glass for flaws under high intensity lights. Four cutters, working on incentive, depended on him for plates, and they were not happy if he was too slow. The boss was not happy if he was too careful. He coped with the stress by taking aspirin and smoking, several cigarettes burning simultaneously. Hamper and his shopmates smoke dope and consume prodigious quantities of alcohol, off and on the job. One guy actually runs a little business on the line, supplying half-pints of whiskey to his mates.

Actually the boredom of the work, its profoundly inhuman quality, is what makes it stressful. In fact, the descriptions of this work were themselves stressful to me; you can almost feel what it does to people. Some become zombies, like the old fellow who spends every day sleeping upright, leaning against the wall by the door to the john, or the man who answers "same old thing" no matter what you say to him. Not a few crack up completely, witness the "rivethead's" line mate who blowtorches his pet mouse and then mutilates himself to qualify for sick leave. A few workers become so habituated to the line that they hate to leave it, like the pensioners who sat in the park

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in my hometown wistfully staring at the plant gate across the street. Ultimately Ben Hamper himself experiences panic attacks of such severity that he is forced to quit the factories and commit himself to a long mental rehabilitation.

These essays give the lie to what we might call work "myths." First, workplaces are not happy places, and the bosses and the workers do not have much in common. Whether it be in auto plants, banks, fast-food joints, hospitals, post offices, or the public schools, work is something to be endured, for the money, period. Sometimes, surveys tell us that people are satisfied with their jobs. But, satisfied compared to what? The lack of a job? An unknown alternative? I have been teaching union workers for years, and it is always the same story. You get pushed around; you count for little; your hours are long, your pay is low; and at any time, you might get put out on the street, just like the trash. True, auto workers made good money; bought houses, cars, and boats; went on vacation; and sent their kids to school. Yet their work took some of the shine from the money, and today this "good life" is gone, lost in the tidal wave of plant closings and union busting. A lot of people ended up selling rabbits, humping at Taco Bell, or peddling Amway products like the hapless victims of Flint plant closings in Michael Moore's great film, "Roger and Me." Amazingly, all of this eludes the ponderings of our social scientists, who prattle on about the new work teams and cooperative management. The worst job Ben Hamper ever had was his last one, in one of the modern "Japanese-style" plants. He dubbed it "Gulag City."

Second, work itself, no matter how oppressive, does not engender class consciousness and solidarity. It is more likely to lead to such poor health and mental stress that any coherent thoughts and actions are difficult. Historians such as David Montgomery and Jeremy Brecher suggest that during the great mass strikes before the Second World War workers eagerly debated great questions. Who should run the factories? Who should lead the nation? My father told me that after the war, his factory was alive with talk of politics. Not so in modern Flint, where meaningful discussions are far outnumbered by talk of booze, sex, sports, and hunting.

What consciousness does develop is of the "us versus you" variety. Ben Hamper and his comrades take a negative pride in the very meaninglessness of the work they do and dislike those who don't or won't or couldn't stand up to it; a kind of self-hatred turned into contempt for outsiders. My auto worker students love to bait me, but often in a wholly negative way. Who am I to talk about work?

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Who am I to criticize GM?(!) While I was in college, they were in Vietnam. Aren't teachers overpaid? Needless to say, I do not know what it is like to work the line. But I do know why depressions occur, why there is so much poverty, what Keynesian policies are, how the Federal Reserve works, why free trade agreements stink and so on, and they do not know these and a lot of other things. Many of them believe that the media causes depressions, that welfare is the root of all evils, that the trouble with sports is that there are too many black players, that Japanese are innately evil. I slog on, but there is more work to be done than a lot of progressives think.

Third, unions, as currently constituted, offer working people a very partial victory. Ben Hamper says little about the UAW; it isn't exactly a daily felt presence on the shop floor. In the old plants, the union made it hard to fire a worker and made it possible for workers to resist and sometimes to defeat the worst management abuses. But at least since the radicals were expelled long ago, it has not stood for anything except higher pay and some job security, and today it cannot deliver these. In the newer plants, it is firmly in bed with the companies, pushing the labor-management cooperation schemes which Parker and Slaughter in their book, *Choosing Sides*, more accurately call "management by stress." There are hopeful rumblings among the rank-and-file in the UAW and in many other unions, but it is a sorry state of affairs when a book like Ben Hamper's has so little to say about what most people consider to be one of the nation's greatest unions.

Ben Hamper has written a "riveting" account of work, devoid of veneer and true to life. He has done so despite alcoholism and mental illness; no doubt the writing is the one thing which kept him alive. In the face of this achievement, it is hard to criticize. Still, I expected something more from him. He is well aware of the insanity of the whole rotten work system, from a mascot dubbed "Howie Makem" prowling the factory dressed in a cat uniform promoting quality, to G.M. chairman, Roger Smith, telling his proles that they will be better off once thousands of them are put on the street and scores of plants closed. Yet he is not much aware of the world outside of the shop, outside of Flint, Michigan. This is the concern of intellectuals like his friend Michael Moore, but not of shoprats. He obviously admires Moore, who has encouraged him to write about his work, but he won't make much effort to bridge the gap of consciousness between them. Why not?

It is this failure, even unwillingness, to push his class consciousness forward when he could which disappointed me. Maybe it is too

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painful to do so. Maybe the unions have failed so utterly to create a working class ideology which would force workers to ask the right question and struggle toward the answers that it is no longer possible to imagine a new world. No doubt radicals have failed workers too, either ignoring them for the pleasures of theoretical debate or trying to become one of them so hard that they forgot that work in this society destroys the human spirit.

If we are ever to liberate ourselves, we must reinvent work. Either we will convert the daily hell which is work today into something which connects us to other people and the world around us or we will descend further into the alienation which engulfs us. Ben Hamper gives us no illusion about work; it is a soul-destroying, lethal experience. But where is the way out?

When the rich assemble to concern themselves with the business of the poor, it is called charity. When the poor assemble to concern themselves with the business of the rich, it is called anarchy.

—Paul Richards

He who gives money he has not earned is generous with other people's labor.

—George Bernard Shaw

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In Search of Civic Equality

by W.H. Locke Anderson

The End of Equality, by Mickey Kaus. New York: Basic Books, 1992. 293 pp. $25.00.

Mickey Kaus, a senior editor of *The New Republic* and an avowed liberal, understands that American society is in profound crisis. But right at the outset, he announces that inequality is here to stay, and he regards this as a good thing. The productivity of capitalism, he claims, is so much greater than that of any alternative mode of production that its attendant "money inequality," as he calls it, is a price worth paying. Moreover, since capitalism must necessarily reward a kind of talent which is at least in part inheritable, money inequality must produce persisting social classes, and would do so even if ownership of the means of production were not so unequally distributed.

However, he directs his readers' attention to a second kind of inequality which he calls "civic inequality," in which people are destined to occupy separate and unequal stations in life and expected to treat their superiors and inferiors differently from their social equals. Civic inequality is unjust in itself, and its presence makes money inequality all the more pernicious. He recalls for us that when Orwell first went to anarchist-controlled Barcelona in December, 1936, he was struck by the extent to which the usual servility and deference of social inferiors had simply disappeared, and "waiters looked you in the face and treated you as an equal." Orwell found this "queer and moving," and said, "[I]n some ways I

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did not even like it, but I recognized it immediately as a state of affairs worth fighting for." When he returned six months later, "things were returning to normal. . . .The waiters were back in their boiled shirts and the shopwalkers were cringing in the familiar manner." (quoted on pp. 14–15)

In the extreme, civic inequality takes the form of class segregation in public life as well as in private. The well-to-do live on the nation's Park Avenues or in its Westchester Counties, and surrender vast urban areas to the poor of all races and the not-so-poor of color. The suburbanites come to the city for entertainment less often than they used to, fearing they may be confronted by beggars or worse. People who can afford to do so take taxis, leaving mass transportation to those who cannot. Movie theaters in the city close, and megatheaters open in suburban malls. City libraries are forced to curtail their hours or close for lack of public support. Businesses move their offices to suburbs and beltway plazas. In the extreme whole corporations move to the Sunbelt, paying the relocation expenses of their most-valued employees and leaving the less-valued behind. Who can doubt, therefore, that civic equality is on the wane? It is not so much that the upper and middle classes treat the lower classes with increasing disdain, but that genuine encounters between the classes are increasingly rare. The erosion of civic equality mirrors the declining habitability of the public sphere, therefore, and the only way to reverse the decline is to rebuild this sphere. Kaus lists a number of fronts on which the decline can be reversed if there is a political will to do so: (1) bring back the military draft, without the "deferments" that made service so selective during the Vietnam War; (2) develop forms of national service alternative to the military, so that service may be genuinely universal without a vast military; (3) put a cap on the amount that candidates for public office may spend on their campaigns, so that access to big money is not necessary to win campaigns, and citizen participation is therefore more important; (4) develop a national health-care system structured so that "everybody waits in the same waiting room"; (5) develop a system of public day-care centers near places of work, rather than near effectively-segregated places of residence. All-in-all, as he says, Kaus wants to "restrict the sphere of life in which money matters."

The class integration of the schools does not appear on this list because it is so closely intertwined with residential segregation by race, which will persist as long as there is a predominantly-black urban underclass. Kaus is quite correct, of course, when he says that other classes can hardly be persuaded to share public spaces with

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people whom they regard as culturally barbarous and often dangerous, and will simply refuse to send their children to school with such people's children. And even if it were possible to convince others that most residents of the urban ghettos were neither barbarous nor dangerous, they would still find menacing enough the minority that fits this description. Transforming the underclass is therefore an absolute prerequisite to transforming the public life of the nation.

Nine decades ago, DuBois wrote (in *The Souls of Black Folk*) that "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line," and it still is. But the color line no longer condemns the entire population of people of color to a lifetime of poverty. The majority of the black population have incomes above the federal poverty level, and black professionals are increasingly moving into areas that were closed to them not so long ago. But still two thirds of those who live in urban neighborhoods classified as areas of "extreme poverty" are black. The ghettos they inhabit are the consequence of complex histories, partly having to do with the decline in rural employment in the South during the 1920s and 1930s, partly with demographic shifts during and after the Second World War, partly with the racist attitudes and practices of whites, and partly with the contemporary crises of the cities. As long as manufacturing jobs could be found in the city, the ghettos were merely poor, but not desperate. But as manufacturing either moved to the Sunbelt or succumbed to competition from abroad, the cities lost their economic basis and much of their tax revenue, and their poor black neighborhoods became the places they are today—ugly, dangerous, and tragic.

So why did the ghetto residents not move elsewhere in search of work? In fact many of the most motivated and self-assured did move, aided by the success of civil rights struggles in lowering barriers to racial integration of the non-ghetto city neighborhoods and suburbs. But the less motivated, venturesome, and economically competent stayed in place. Kaus places a good deal of the blame for the persistence of the ghettos on the welfare system, particularly Aid to Families with Dependent Children, which he thinks made it possible for people to remain in the central cities after the jobs had left, and even to increase in numbers. Hell hath no fury like his scorn for AFDC, which is not directed so much at "welfare mothers" as at "money liberals" in Congress who make it all possible. (It is not at all clear, by the way, whether Kaus understands that the largest group of AFDC mothers is made up of white women in their early thirties with one or two children.)

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Kaus's proposal for solving the dilemma that the underclass creates for "civic liberalism" is a revival of the WPA, the Works Progress Administration established late in Roosevelt's first term. He advocates the establishment of a federally funded "workfare" system, and the abolition of all forms of welfare, including AFDC. Presumably he does not intend to take all monetary support away from the aged and the infirm. Nor, alas, does he propose to revive the cultural projects of the original WPA. But he seriously means to end monetary assistance to the able-bodied and to create federally-funded work projects that are required to employ anyone who will work for slightly less than the minimum wage, supplemented by an enhanced earned-income tax credit. (His workfare project must be understood to be part of a package which includes the public provision of health care and day care mentioned above. But he does not address the inadequacy of the minimum wage, which really must be addressed if his plan is to be taken seriously on its own terms.)

He estimates that the cost to the taxpayers, net of the monetary saving in welfare benefits, would be $43 to $59 billion, *placing a zero value on the work performed.* Of course he hastens to add that he expects many tangible nonmonetary benefits, such as "collected garbage, a clean subway station, a basketball hoop with a new net." It is hard to see why he chose such a trivial list of projects, considering how ghastly ghetto neighborhoods can be, but he adds, significantly, "If the jobs took 'ghetto poor' workers outside the ghetto, so much the better." (p. 134) Attached to this list is a lengthy endnote summarizing some of the major accomplishments of the WPA: "In its eight-year existence, according to official records, the WPA built or improved 651,000 miles of roads, 953 airports, 124,000 bridges and viaducts, 1,178,000 culverts, 8,000 parks, 18,000 playgrounds and athletic fields, and 2,000 swimming pools. It constructed 40,000 buildings (including 8,000 schools) and repaired 85,000 more. Much of New York City—including LaGuardia airport, FDR Drive, plus hundreds of parks and libraries—was built by the WPA. . . . Lester Thurow has suggested that New York's infrastructure is now decaying because no WPA has existed to repair or replace these public works in the half-century since." (p. 259)

What Kaus fails to stress are the considerable benefits that jobs would bring to the ghetto residents themselves. Constructive work is not "irksome", as bourgeois economists seem to think. It is the principal activity in which a normal adult constitutes his or her sense of self in human society. Is it not telling that in the United States, at least, the question "What do you do?" means "What is your job?"

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Corporate presidents think of themselves as corporate presidents, and have therefore a justified pride. But welfare mothers are just welfare mothers, and people who do little but hang out on the stoop are not much of anything. In learning a skill, such as making a frame and pouring concrete for a sidewalk, there is something good in and of itself, quite apart from the paycheck and the usefulness of the sidewalk. Marxists understand this, but liberals apparently do not. Yet people who are competent and proud of their work, and therefore possessed of a secure sense of self, are precisely the kinds of people who are agreeable to meet, confident and constructive in public discourse, and valued in their communities. They are the waiters of Barcelona, if you will, who look you in the face and treat you as an equal.

There is a second, more obvious omission, one which is harder to understand. There are only five references to drugs in the index, and none of the corresponding passages in the text is any more than a passing remark. This is an amazing and resounding silence. The illegal drug trade and the high incidence of drug use in the ghettos are among the most central facts of life for people who live there, and the consequences spread far beyond the boundaries of the blighted areas. Moreover, the reactions of people who do not live in ghettos to encounters with those who do are heavily conditioned by the myths and realities of drugs. Workfare will never bring ghetto neighborhoods into the public sphere as long as they are places where one has a quite reasonable fear of being mugged or even killed while simply trying to visit a friend.

The main sources of the ever-present violence in the ghetto are everyday facts of life there—the machismo of men who must insistently deny their chronic failure, the frequent necessity for addicts to steal to support a heavy habit, the extreme irrationality of people who are chronically drunk or high, the struggles among dealers over territory, the punishment of users and pushers who do not pay their bills, and the general paranoia of people who live in a constant climate of violence. The police who are charged with keeping a lid on this situation are themselves often violent beyond reason, and it is not hard to understand why. No one can really have expected Kaus to have a persuasive solution to the problems of drugs and urban violence, but I am astonished that he has nothing to say about them. Civic equality will remain a chimera as long as people of color must live in such squalid and violent neighborhoods. My guess is that putting an end to this condition will require not only something like reviving the WPA, but vastly expanding drug treat-

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ment facilities at public expense, legalizing the use of cocaine and marijuana (which seem to be the easiest habits to break), and selling these two drugs to adults in state-regulated stores. This last might bring a noticeable increase in addiction among "respectable people," which would make it unacceptable to the electorate. But there will be no equality until the drug problem is faced directly.

Finally, he makes no attempt to assess the chances that the powers that be will move in the direction he points to. The ruling class of the 1930s was violently opposed to much of the New Deal, and especially to the WPA, which hired the unemployed directly rather than funding projects carried out by private enterprise as its predecessor the Public Works Administration (PWA) had done. Although the underclass has to some extent to be supported out of surplus, it is not entirely a burden from the perspective of the ruling class. John Kenneth Galbraith, in his recent book *The Culture of Contentment*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1992), devotes a chapter to "the functional underclass," as he calls it, and acknowledges that "The economically fortunate, not excluding those who speak with greatest regret of the existence of this class, are heavily dependent on its presence." (p. 31) The underclass, after all, makes up most of the industrial reserve army and of the seasonal and migratory farm labor force.

Doubtless there are elements of the ruling class whose fortunes are not heavily dependent on the persistence of this class, and who will give careful consideration to a program like Kaus's, particularly if the urban class struggle takes a more incendiary turn. Like as not, many of them will insist on "privatizing" publicly-funded projects to employ the underclass, much as the PWA did, or as the right is now proposing to do with the public schools. This would commit the public to subsidizing the exploitation of a class it now partly supports with welfare programs, but at least it would give people work experience and teach them skills.

The End of Equality has only about 200 pages of text, but it states its case succinctly, and the text is enhanced by nearly 100 pages of endnotes that add substance and provide many references. I had not expected to like the book when I first picked it up, but I regard it as one of the best pieces I have seen on the central contradiction of American society. Kaus goes way beyond the level of exposing and deploring the ruling class's moral corruption, as William Greider does in *Who Will Tell the People* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), or analyzing its satisfaction with the status quo, as Galbraith does. He outlines a far-reaching program to reverse the trends and tend-

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encies he deplores, conceptualizes it on a grand scale, and engages his readers in his vision. Obviously his reach exceeds his grasp, but what he does achieve is first rate, and his hesitancies invite others to reach further and complete his unfinished project. And if the classes with political power cannot see which way to turn, the lower classes will light a few fires to guide them.

The people recognize themselves in their commodities, they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment. The very mechanism which ties the individual to his society has changed, and social control is anchored in the new needs which it has produced.

—Herbert Marcuse

(Continued from inside back cover)

(see his article "Learning from the Labor Experience" in the March 1991 issue of MR). He came east for the October 1990 conference on "The Future of Socialism" which MR hosted with the Marxist School, and we remember well his enthusiastic participation. The news of his death from a heart attack almost immediately after his return home was a totally unexpected shock. We record with gratitude a generous contribution in his memory sent by his widow Ilse on the second anniversary of his death.

We celebrate Rigoberta Menchu, winner of this year's Nobel Peace Prize, and we commend the decision of the Award Committee. We remember our dear friend and long-time colleague Bobbye Ortiz who opened her heart, her home, and our eyes to Rigoberta Menchu on her first visit to the United States in the early 1980s. How proud and delighted Bobbye would have been with this public acknowledgement of the courageous human rights activities of Rigoberta. She is the first indigenous person of the Americas to receive this honor, and it is especially significant in this year of the Columbus quincentennial.

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Edited by: Ronald H. Chilcote
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(Continued from inside front cover)

only in all-out war situations; the rest of the time there is not only a lot of unused labor power and productive capacity but also a plethora of money capital looking for profitable investment opportunities. In these conditions, the "crowding-out" theory is out-and-out nonsense.

Are we to conclude that there is no such thing as a deficit problem? Not at all. A deficit establishes a debt. Under the rules of the capitalist game, debts have to be "serviced," i.e., interest has to be paid to whoever holds the debt. As the debt grows, so also does the amount of interest that has to be paid. (We can abstract from the need to repay the principal of the debt since in practice this is customarily handled by "rolling over" the debt, or repaying it by an equivalent amount of new borrowing.) Repeated deficits therefore pump up the debt and add to the annual amount of interest that has to be paid. When the sums involved are small, this process creates no problem. But the larger the debt grows, the more serious the problem becomes.

Applying this reasoning to national debts, we see that there is no way a country could make running (substantial) deficits a permanent part of its economic policy. Sooner or later a real "crowding out" problem would inevitably emerge: interest payments on the national debt (transfers from taxpayers to bondholders) would co-opt more and more of the government's revenue, leaving less and less for all other purposes. But long before this process reached its theoretical limit, it would be bound to create a crisis which could not be resolved within the existing institutional framework.

How close are we to such a crisis in this country today? In the post-Second World War period, the deficit began to be perceived as a problem in the 1960s, and it has grown steadily ever since. Interest on the national debt was about 7 percent of all federal outlays in 1975, and today it is still under 15 percent. This is of course far from insignificant, but it is manageable. What is really alarming, however, is the rate of growth indicated by these figures: a doubling in fifteen years. At this rate, interest on the national debt would eat up the entire federal budget in less than forty years, and it is safe to say that the crisis would reach an acute stage well before that.

This, then, is the real deficit problem. Those who hold that the time has come to begin to do something about it are obviously right. The longer the delay, the worse the crisis will get. But do what? The almost unanimous answer seems to be: balance the budget, or at least reduce the deficit to the point where increases in the national debt would not exceed the rate of growth of Gross Domestic Product (with the latter rate as low as it is now, that comes to pretty much the same thing as balancing the budget). The trouble is that there is nearly as unanimous recognition that a substantial reduction, let alone elimination, of the deficit from its present level of more than $350 billion would knock an already sick economy into a cocked hat.

This is the dilemma from which we started: the economy can't live without deficits and it can't live with them. In this space next month, we will have a look at ways that are being proposed to escape from this seeming impasse.

We counted Phil Eden, a West Coast economist and long-time activist in labor and progressive causes, among our most committed supporters

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GATHERING RAGE

The Failure of 20th Century Revolutions to Develop a Feminist Agenda

MARGARET RANDALL

In ***Gathering Rage***, writer, poet, and activist Margaret Randall vividly describes how the revolutions in Nicaragua and Cuba addressed or failed to address issues of women's equality. Randall combines anecdotes with analysis to show how distorted visions of liberation and shortcomings in practice left a legacy that not only shortchanged women but undermined the revolutionary project itself.

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